

BOOK REVIEW

FOUR KEY CONCEPTS FROM THE QURAN

Juneefa Bilal  
Anantnag, Kashmir

**Book title:**

Four key concepts from the Quran

**Published:**

2006

**Publisher:**

Islamic Foundation, UK

**Author(s):**

Syed Abul Aala Maududi  
Tarik Jan (Editor and Translator)

**Introduction to author:**

Maulana Syed Abu 'Ala Maududi was one of the most prominent scholars of twentieth century (Mawdudi & Jan, 2006). He was a prolific writer. Both Western and South Asian scholars regard him as one of the most powerful Islamic ideologue of the twentieth century whose ideas and writings influenced a large number of Islamic Movements in the Muslim World (Paracha, 2015). He was the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest religiopolitical Islamic organisation in South Asia. Tarik Jan, the translator and editor of the book being discussed writes: "Until his death on 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 1979, he wrote over 140 books and tracts on Islam, covering almost every aspect of its thought and message" (Mawdudi & Jan, 2006, pp. viii-ix). Considering the current situation the Muslim Ummah is going through, Jan opines that "The need for translating Maududi's works in English was never as pressing as it is today" (Mawdudi & Jan, 2006, p. ix).

**Introduction to the book:**

"The Four Terminologies of the Qur'an" was originally written in Urdu under the title of "Qur'an ki Chaar Bunyadi Istilahein" (قرآن کی چار بنیادی اصطلاحیں). It originally appeared as a series of articles in the magazine "Tarjuman-ul-Qur'an". Later on this series of articles was compiled into the book form (Mawdudi, 2000). The book consists of 4 chapters along with a preface. In the English edition of the book, the introduction (Debacha) of Tafheem ul Quran has also been added to the book (Mawdudi & Jan, 2006, pp. 1-30).

In this book, Maulana Maududi has tried to remove some of the misunderstandings that have accumulated over the time in relation to the basic principles of Islam and the message of Quran. He

has tried to bring out the true connotation of four basic Qur'anic terms i.e. Illah, Rabb, Deen and Ibadah by direct reference to the Arabic lexicon and the Qur'an. In explaining the meanings and the implications of these concepts, he has presented numerous examples from the previous nations as well as the pre-Islamic Arabia. Each of the terms is explained with reference to numerous verses from the Quran (Mawdudi, 2000, pp. 7–9).

**Maulana Maududi's motives behind writing this book:**

Maulana Maududi, in the introduction of the book, has quoted a number of verses from Qur'an to acquaint the readers that the entire content of the Qur'an revolves round these four key terms. He explains that a person who is oblivious and unaware about the true meaning of terms Illah, Rabb, Ibadah and Deen, will not be able to grasp the real meaning of the Quran (Mawdudi, 2000, p. 9). Maulana He opines that there is a wide-spread misunderstanding among the Ummah regarding the meaning of these four terms. While explaining the reasons behind these misapprehensions, he points out that early Muslims were aware of the real meaning of these four terms, but gradually the meaning of these terms became limited (Mawdudi, 2000, p. 11). Gradual decline of interest and proficiency in Arabic language is another reason behind these misapprehensions as per Maulana Maududi. The repercussion of these misunderstandings, according to Maulana Maududi, is that three-fourth of the teachings of the Qur'an have become obscured for a vast population from the ummah (Mawdudi, 2000, p. 14). It is accordingly inevitable to explain them in a proper and structured manner.

Thus, the main motive of Maulana Maududi behind writing this book is to remove the commonly prevalent vague conceptions of these terms and the misunderstandings in the minds of people concerning these terms, so that the real spirit of the Qur'an becomes clear to the Ummah.

**Overview of the contents:**

Maulana Maududi starts his discussion by explaining the term Illah. After explaining at length the literary meaning, it is implied by the author that the word Illah includes capacities (in their highest form) to help others, to provide them protection, to provide them peace mysteriously; The word Illah also implies dominance, and power and authority to do all these things. Then, author discusses the view of pre-Islamic Arabia and the Qur'anic concept of Illah, and concludes that godhood and authority are interconnected and both signify the same thing in its meaning as well as in its spirit. It is emphasised that godhood includes monarchy and rulership and it is a necessary part of Tawheed that it must be believed that no one other than Almighty Allah possesses the ultimate authority and no one should be believed to have any share with Almighty Allah in this respect.

While explaining the literary meaning of Rabb, the author implies that this word connotes five meanings i.e., one who fosters, one who supervises, one who occupies a central position, one who is obeyed along with acknowledging his supremacy and master. Then, Maulana Maududi examines the false notions which existed among the misguided tribes and people about Rabubiyah during pre-Islamic times. After mentioning a number of Qur'anic verses, Maulana Maududi concludes that Rabubiyah is exactly synonymous with sovereignty of Allah and He is the source of law and man can only enforce His law on land being his vicegerent and man himself can't frame any law or constitution. Allah is the supreme authority and to Him belongs all power. He is the Absolute King of

all the Universe and ruler of all the creations. It is by virtue of this attribute of Allah that He alone is worthy of worship and it is a necessary part of Tawheed that it must be believed that no one other than Almighty Allah is the sovereign power and supreme authority and no one should be believed to have any share with Almighty Allah in this respect.

Maulana Maududi concludes that Ibadah is used in three senses i.e., worship, bondage and submission. Thus, Ibadah doesn't consist merely of performing acts of prayer and worship, it includes acceptance of Allah as the supreme object of loyalty and commitment to obey and follow His command and to do His will. Essentially, Allah alone has the right to give command, and to demand exclusive service and obedience from man. Thus, submission to man-made laws is blasphemy and Qur'an demands that Ibadah in whatever form it take should be reserved for Allah and obedience to taghoot should be completely abandoned.

While explaining the Qur'anic usage of term Deen, Maulana Maududi concludes that Deen is a comprehensive term which consists of composite parts as retribution meted out by authority, establishment of thought and action by authority, obedience and sovereignty. He believes that Islam covers all aspects of life. Man is required to submit to Almighty Allah not only in places of worship but at all places and at all times. Thus, Deen should be exclusively for Allah with no share of it for any constitution or for man-made laws.

Maulana Maududi puts forth a fact that the terms Illah, Rabb, Ibadah and Deen categorically assert that all the power and authority vests exclusively in the hands of Almighty Allah. Everything that exists is subservient and submissive to him and nor does anyone have even the least share in His Sovereignty and Authority.

Maulana Maududi impresses upon us to accept that Allah is the Rabb, and the Ilah; No-one else possesses the qualities and attributes implied by these terms; therefore, men should give their 'ibadah to Him and Him alone; and one's deen should be exclusively for Him with no share of it for any other.

#### **Criticism of the book:**

This book has been criticized by Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadvi in his work "Asr-e-Hazir mein Deen ki Tafheem aur Tashreeh" (Nadvi, 1979). He criticized Maulana Maududi for his interpretation of these four terms. He, while criticising, says that Maulana Maududi in his book "The Four Terminologies of the Qur'an" tries to claim that he himself is the only person who has understood the Qur'an in real sense, in general, and these four terms, in particular; and the rest of the Ummah is ignorant about the real meaning of the Qur'an. He accuses Maulana Maududi of changing the meaning of these terms.

Also, Maulana Wahidudin Khan has criticized this book in his work "T'aebeer ki Ghalti" (Khan, 1995). In this book, Maulana Wahidudin Khan writes that Maulana Maududi is highly influenced by political philosophy and all his literature revolves round his political thought. He criticized Maulana Maududi for his book "The Four Terminologies of the Qur'an" on the ground that Maulana Maududi, while explaining, these terms has his political thought in his mind and he has tried to interpret these terms with that perspective.

This book has been also criticized by Maulana Manzoor Naumani and Maulana Yousuf Ludhianvi.

**Counter-arguments:**

There have also been counter arguments in the favour of this book. For example, Syed Hamid Ali's book "Qur'ani Istilahaat aur Ulma-e- Salf-o-Khalf" (published by MMI Publishers, New Delhi) explains the key terminologies of the Qur'an, along with these four main terms, in the light of Arabic lexicon, the Qur'an and the Hadith. Besides, he also discusses the interpretation of these terms as provided by the Salf-e-Saliheen. Also, the act of vindicating this book was done by Dr. Ubaidullah Fahad Falahi in his book "Ahay-e-Deen aur Hindustani Ullama" (احیائے دین اور ہندوستانی علماء). He refutes the criticism of Maulana Manzoor Naumani, Abul Hassan Ali Nadvi and Maulana Wahidudin Khan.

**Conclusion:**

I personally agree with the interpretation and understanding of Maulana Maududi as this is based entirely on the Qur'an and the Sunnah and the classical Arabic language. Besides, this interpretation is in conformity with the interpretation of Salf-e-Saliheen, as explained by various scholars. I would recommend this book to the serious readers and would suggest them to read the refutations and counter-refutations of the book with an open heart and mind.

**References:**

Khan, W. ud D. (1995). *Tabeer ki ghalti [Error in interpretation]*. New Delhi: Maktaba Ar-risala.

Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/TabeerKiGhaltiByWaheeduddinKhan>

Mawdudi, S. A. A. (2000). *Quran ki char bunyadi istalahain [The four basics terms in the Quran]*.

Lahore: Islamic Publications. Retrieved from

<https://archive.org/details/Quranki4BunyadiIslahatUrdu>

Mawdudi, S. A. A., & Jan, T. (2006). *Four Key Concepts of the Qur'an*. UK: Islamic Foundation.

Nadvi, A. H. A. (1979). *Asr e Hazir main deen ki tafheem o tashreeh [Understanding and explanation*

*of the religion in the present age]*. Karachi: Majlis Nashriyat e Islam. Retrieved from

[http://www.archive.org/stream/Asr-e-HazirMaynDeenKiTafheem-o-](http://www.archive.org/stream/Asr-e-HazirMaynDeenKiTafheem-o-TashreehByShaykhSyedAbulHasanAli/Asr-e-HazirMaynDeenKiTafheem-o-TashreehByShaykhSyedAbulHasanAliNadvi.a#page/n10/mode/1up)

[TashreehByShaykhSyedAbulHasanAli/Asr-e-HazirMaynDeenKiTafheem-o-](http://www.archive.org/stream/Asr-e-HazirMaynDeenKiTafheem-o-TashreehByShaykhSyedAbulHasanAli/Asr-e-HazirMaynDeenKiTafheem-o-TashreehByShaykhSyedAbulHasanAliNadvi.a#page/n10/mode/1up)

[TashreehByShaykhSyedAbulHasanAliNadvi.a#page/n10/mode/1up](http://www.archive.org/stream/Asr-e-HazirMaynDeenKiTafheem-o-TashreehByShaykhSyedAbulHasanAliNadvi.a#page/n10/mode/1up)

Paracha, N. F. (2015, January 1). Abul Ala Maududi: An existentialist history. *DAWN News*. Retrieved from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1154419>